



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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SECRETARY

**EXHIBIT
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Dear Editor,

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck and New Orleans began to flood, alarmists told the media that the floodwaters would become dangerously contaminated and, immediately, the "toxic soup" myth was born. Hundreds of samples and thousands of analyses later, the facts show that floodwaters were unsanitary because of sewage contamination, but not toxic. In fact, the quality of the floodwaters (except for salinity) was very similar to monitored stormwater discharges from the city during past years.

Alarmists then announced we were killing Lake Pontchartrain by pumping the floodwaters back into the lake. Extensive testing shows no adverse effect on the lake's ecosystem. Water quality is good and bacteria levels are below the most stringent water quality standards established for swimming. Sampling by state and federal agencies show seafood in the lake, estuaries, and surrounding coastal areas is safe for consumption.

Then came "toxic sediments," with the alarmists claiming the sediments left by flooding were dangerously contaminated. Hundreds of samples and thousands of chemical analyses have documented over the past several months that, with a few notable exceptions, the chemistry of soils and sediments is little changed from pre-Katrina conditions, and levels of contaminants are similar to other older urban centers around the country.

Then came "toxic dust." Alarmists told us that there would be a serious health threat as the contaminated sediments dried and became airborne as dust. Extensive chemical analyses of dust particles collected in the New Orleans area over recent months have shown no exceedances of standards established to protect public health. Another false alarm.

Then came "contaminated air." Alarmists pointed to an elevated benzene reading recorded during recent air monitoring efforts and proclaimed the air in New Orleans was unsafe. EPA reports on its website that the elevated benzene level was believed to be due to exhaust from passing vehicles. All of the ambient air sampling results collected to date are typical for this region of the state and are below any levels of health concern.

Scaremongering by alarmists and the media coverage they receive has created unnecessary anxiety for those displaced by the storm and who are trying to decide if they can safely return. Having to respond to inaccurate, misleading, and often outrageous claims diverts resources from environmental and public health agencies that are stretched extremely thin in hurricane recovery efforts. The steady drumbeat of false alarms about unhealthful environmental conditions in the New Orleans area is undoubtedly having an adverse affect on national perceptions of the city and its future. Those engaged in this scaremongering are doing a grave disservice to New Orleans and the state. Their efforts would be better spent in helping with the recovery rather than impeding it.

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